

EVERY so often the State Department of Agriculture and the State Chamber of Commerce bring businessmen and farmers together to tour New Jersey's industries and farms as a means of promoting mutual respect. Midday naturally means a pleasant lunch somewhere, and for Fred W. Jackson, information director of the Department of Agriculture, the occasion helps show how far the farmer has come socially.

Usually, as the businessmen and farmers dine in conviviality, a head waiter will approach Fred and whisper: "Mr. Jackson, what ones are the farmers?"

Nothing better helps illustrate the fact that the days of the hay-chewing, chin-whiskered caricature of a farmer are long gone. Just in case anyone doubts it—and, after all, not everyone has the vantage point of a head waiter—look about in the crowds at the county fairs next summer. Ask yourself: "What ones are the farmers? What ones are the farmers' wives? What ones are from the city?"

THE fact is, of course, that at mid-point in the 20th century the New Jersey farmer often is as much businessman and civic leader as he is

This is the last of twenty articles in a series on New Jersey's highly diversified agriculture, vigorous and growing despite the constant inroads of industrial and residential development.

tiller of the soil. His wife is as much clubwoman, modern mother and community leader as she is keeper of the farmhouse. No longer is the farmer set aside as someone different, as someone likely to be called Zeke or Cy, as someone likely to pronounce cow, "caow."

This is something relatively new. Three or four decades ago most New Jersey farmers weren't far removed from the rube whose image flowed so easily from the cartoonist's pen. More often than not in those days the farmer grubbed a living nowhere near commensurate with the hours he put in. He was in meager, if not dire, economic straits. His living conditions were 30 years behind that of his city cousins. Politicians wooed him strenuously in October, forgot him in December.

The pendulum has swung far, started by needs of World War I, primed by economic support fostered during the early days of the New Deal and accelerated by the food demands of World War II. Today the Garden State farmer generally is in much sounder condition than his father or his grandfather. He is not nearly so poor as he might think; but, on the other hand, neither is he nearly as rich as the average consumer might think.

OVER and above the economic aspect, the whole outlook of New Jersey's farmer is much improved over 30 years ago. He is better educated than his father, and his children will be better educated than he. He has,



CHANGING TIMES AND THE FARMER

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

The Jersey Agriculturist, Who Frequently
Shines as Businessman and Civic Leader,
Must Also Keep Abreast of World Events,
Domestic Economy and Eating Trends Long
Before Turning Over the Soil for Planting

Farmers, businessmen and industrialists meet periodically on tours conducted by the State Department of Agriculture and State Chamber of Commerce. Scene (above) was photographed during visit to Forsgate Farms in Jamesburg.

with rare exceptions, lost the narrowness of thought which marked rural life before the early 1920s. The farmer is, in short, a man of stature, a man of broadened outlook, a man as much at home in a charcoal gray flannel suit as his commuting neighbors who go in to Philadelphia or Newark or New York. Not that the latter is necessarily an indication of social rank or business standing, but it does make it tough for the head waiter who wishes to know the difference.

Today the farmer is mechanized, he's educated, he has experienced reasonably good times for 10 to 15 years. Yet his problems remain many and varied. Nature still shows him her fickleness. She can bite his peach blossoms with April cold, blacken his cranberry bogs with a June frost. She can withhold rain from his gasping acres in June and July, drench his fields when he should be gathering hay or picking tomatoes. She can sweep fall hurricanes over the state

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JERSEY FARMERS TODAY



Mechanized to an amazing degree from ground to sky, Garden State farmers employ plane spraying to control plant disease and insects.

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to level his chicken houses and to shake down his ripened apples.

Man-made problems go hand in hand with nature. Marketing, for example, plagues most New Jersey farmers. Shall they sell milk in gallon containers to offset a threatened collapse of their prices? Shall they cut down egg production to keep prices at a reasonable level? Labor is another worry. Shall the farmer try to get another hired hand or should he buy a new machine? Should he hire Puerto Rican workers, and, if he does, how can he keep them happy so far from home?

AND, for all the handsomeness of the dairy farms and the apparent opulence of many chicken farms, many a farmer is saddled with debt. Many a Sussex dairy farmer hides a staggering indebtedness behind his neat fences, many a chicken farmer in Ocean, Monmouth and Atlantic counties faces the future with the realization that he owes far more than ordinary economics would sanction.

Nevertheless, the overall outlook of the New Jersey farmer in 1955 is favorable. Dour predictions that industry or housing will crowd the farmer from New Jersey are not soon likely to come true. Indeed, agriculture grows steadily even if emphasis on basic types of production constantly shifts within the state. Dairying and poultry drop temporarily one year, nurseries and blueberry plantings increase. Vegetables for the fresh market drop slightly, vegetables for processing rise slightly. So it goes; annual farm output stays close to 400 million dollars annually.

Probably nothing typifies the New Jersey farmer as much as his ability to gauge the temper of the buying public and to shift to meet demands. He is aided by proximity to markets, but he helps himself by keeping abreast of everything new.

A recent magazine cartoon underscored what the farmer must be today. It showed two farmers coming out of the county public library and one of them was saying, "With this new-fangled farming, Lem, I gotta study world conditions, domestic economy, eating trends and census statistics before I do my spring planting!" How

true that is—and especially in New Jersey, where the margin between profit and loss often is so slim as to be ruinous if a wrong guess is made.

ASSESSING the position of the New Jersey farmer is somewhat easier than pointing to one farmer and saying, "Here is Mr. Garden State Farmer. Here is the typical New Jersey agriculturist."

The difficulty rises because there are so many varied types of farmers. There are the hundreds of dairy specialists, the thousands of chicken growers, the thousands of vegetable farmers. There are scores of men who grow nothing but blueberries or cranberries. There are those who specialize in apples, those who emphasize peaches. There are men who grow flowers, men who grow nursery plants. Even within certain categories there is no sameness; one vegetable farmer may be as different from his neighbor as the dairy farmer is from the chicken farmer.

As a means of illustrating this, take an imaginary short ride out the road from Freehold to West Freehold and on to Smithburg in Monmouth County. Here, beyond question, is the vista of farming, yet what kind of farming? Here is a grain grower, across the street a potato farmer. Next is a man who grows vegetables for fresh market, next a big apple orchard, then a dairy farm, then a chicken range and then a broad pasture in which 50 black Angus cattle fatten.

Pick the "typical" farmer even on that one road and you would have each of his neighbors snorting. Once, and not so long ago, it would have been the potato farmer and no questions asked. Since potato subsidies went the way of public wrath in 1950, however, the Freehold-Smithburg road is the picture of agricultural diversity—and thus typifies in one small area the many-sided picture of Garden State agriculture. It's not an unusual rural New Jersey road, by any means.

TO understand the New Jersey farmer, nonetheless, it is helpful to see him as an individual. Census statistics help a bit. They show he's no fuzzy-cheeked youngster—his average age is a wee shade under 53. There are 10,500 New Jersey farmers (out of

about 25,000) who are more than 55 years old. Of the "over 55" group there are more than 4,000 over 65 years of age! The New Jersey farmer doesn't take up woodworking or St. Petersburg just because 65 years have dropped from the calendar.

The census shows farm ownership to be a keynote in the state; only 7.7 per cent of the state's farms are operated by tenants, compared, by the way, with 23 per cent in 1920. That means a reasonably long stay on a piece of ground—the average state farmer has stayed put on the same farm some 15 years.

One fact should raise some eyebrows: The number of New Jersey farms 1,000 or more acres in size has doubled in the last 30 years. Ah, then, New Jersey agriculture is trending toward big farms? Yes, in a limited way, because large organizations like Seabrook Farms in south Jersey or Ideal Farms in Sussex County have consolidated many small farms in recent years.

But wait. Here's another figure, showing that farms are getting smaller, too! The number of farms under 10 acres has also nearly doubled in the last 30 years. That's due to two reasons: the increase in chicken farms with limited acreage and the rise of the "gentleman farmer" who buys six or seven acres and raises a small flock of sheep or a small herd of beef steer and still clings to his "city" job.

COMBINING the trend toward bigger farms together with the similar trend to smaller farms, it all levels out in the state to an average of 70 acres per individual farm. Nice little patches, the Texas cattle man or the Wisconsin dairy man would say—yet on those nice little patches the New Jersey farmer gets the highest gross income per acre in the nation. And he must—his land is also the highest-priced farm acreage in the United States.

There are farmers who get incredible yields from their New Jersey acres. There is the Vineland market gardener who last year netted \$30,000 from a succession of crops on seven acres. There is the Monmouth vegetable farmer who is winding up a long life on about 10 acres of land. None of his four sons will continue the farm—two of them are lawyers,

one is a doctor and the fourth is at Harvard School of Business. They have been reared and educated from a garden patch. Nice little patches, indeed.

Not all farmers fare as well unfortunately. The last census (1950) showed 1,800 New Jersey farms had gross incomes over \$25,000, another 5,300 had incomes between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Yet, it also served to point up the solid fact that close to 60 per cent of all Garden State farmers grossed less than \$5,000 (although that does include the small "gentlemen farmers" who often don't care much whether they make money or not as long as they live in the country).

There is a fascination in playing the census numbers game, but it may lead to deadly tedium. It doesn't necessarily prove anything outside of averages, either. The New Jersey farmer still eludes exact classification, census or no.

ONE thing which fetches the mere outsider up short in a study of the Garden State farmer is his high degree of organization. He is organized to buy, organized to sell, organized to exchange trade secrets, organized for social reasons, organized (it sometimes seems to the onlooker) just to prove that he is as gregarious as anyone else. No farmer walks alone in New Jersey—unless he wants to.

This is a marked change from, say, 100 years ago. Then the average farmer was beset with the loneliness which overtook him as he milked in the predawn hours or sheared sheep by the light of a lantern. He worked far too many hours every day, too many days every week, too many weeks every year.

Those were the "good old days"—good because they are long bygone and good because the tales of high fun at barn raisings and husking bees and hog killings obscure the gruelling weariness of days between. The farmer of 1855 was lonely, he was poor, he suffered from the inability to join calloused hands with those of his neighbors.

The occasional county and state fairs helped some. Meetings of county agricultural societies brought knowledge to others. Still, the era of science and cooperation didn't begin until after the Civil War, then it came on with a rush. The Land Grant col-





Sussex County Farm and Horse Show at Branchville Fairgrounds (left) and Middle Atlantic Farm Show in Atlantic City's Convention Hall (below) are typical fairs which serve to bring farmers together.



leges (including Rutgers) stimulated scientific farming and the rise of the Grange movement in the 1870s gave the farmer increased social and political strength.

Today the Grange continues as a strong bonding element for the farmer—in highly rural areas the Grange hall is next to the church in importance. The Farm Bureau exerts strong influence in New Jersey through most of the county agricultural boards and indirectly on up to the State Board of Agriculture. In Ocean County the Farmers' Union is the rallying point for many chicken farmers.

COOPERATIVE selling at auctions and by other means has been discussed in a previous article. Equally important is cooperative buying—perhaps more important, since there is a saying that the New Jersey farmer "buys at retail, sells at wholesale." That means that anything he can save on feed, fertilizer, seeds and so on is money earned. Nearly 40 cooperatives buy for farmer members within the state.

However, farmer organization in the state goes beyond mere dollars and cents. Farmers are organized in dozens of ways to promote mutual interest and knowledge. Each year at Farmers' Week in Trenton 45 to 50 different group meetings are held—ranging from Beekeepers Assn. to Flying Farmers, from Aberdeen-Angus Assn. to United Milk Producers, from Poultry Assn. to Potato Assn., from cooperative associations to Horticultural Society.

That's just a beginning. Throughout the year, from Sussex to Cape May, farmers meet to discuss everything from improvement of the breed to improvement of the market. Their technical interchanges are vital and valuable, yet there is every possibility that they also find comfort in organization. Man is, after all, most happy when he is in the company of those with similar interests.

NOTHING quite brings farmers together like the traditional annual fairs—and these serve also to make farmer and consumer touch hand and heart on a common ground. Fairs go all the way back 250 to 300 years in New Jersey, serving as a showplace (and in early days as a market place)

for the farmer and his family. Often in years gone by there seemed far more interest in fast-running ponies than in prize pigs or handsome afghans but through the years the fairs have proved highly purposeful.

Last year New Jersey had nine farm fairs and nine 4-H fairs, most of them held in July, August and September. They ranged from relatively small county fairs to the big, shiny (and sometimes expensive and "citified") State Fair at Trenton. In addition, the New Jersey Mid-Atlantic Farm Show at Atlantic City (scheduled this year Nov. 2 to 5) puts New Jersey farming on view for thousands of off-season shore visitors.

Still, a fair can be only a showcase. To understand and appraise the New Jersey farmer it's necessary to see him on his working lot—on his acres and in his outbuildings.

Set in the midst of one of the world's most intensely urban areas, the New Jersey farmer quite naturally has benefited from the building of roads, the spread of electrical power lines and the increased number of telephone lines. Today 90 per cent of all New Jersey farms are on hard-surfaced roads (compared with only 33 per cent in 1925). In 1955, 98 per cent of all New Jersey farms are electrified (compared with 44 per cent in 1925). Rare is the farm without a telephone.

All these things have helped the farmer. Electricity gives him many extra "hands" in his barn and sheds. The farmer's wife enjoys her electric stove, her refrigerator, her washing machine and her television set—just as her sister in the city. Good roads have helped carry produce to market. The telephone has knit rural areas closely within themselves and to the rest of the state and the nation.

MECHANIZATION has rolled over New Jersey farms in amazing manner in the last 25 years. There are nearly 27,000 tractors on New Jersey farms—and many farmers own four or five or more tractors. Most farmers have found the wisdom of buying other types of machinery—harvesters, combines, choppers, plows, barn cleaners, milking machines and many other labor-saving devices. Machines come high, but so does labor. Some of the mechanization has reached astounding heights. Nothing proves this bet-

ter than the airplanes dropping low over broad south Jersey fields to spread dusts and sprays to control insects and disease.

Nevertheless, labor remains a major problem. The 1950 census showed New Jersey farmers paid out nearly 40 million dollars in wages—and that didn't include 13,000 unpaid members of operators' families! Where to get labor continues a pressing problem.

In the northwest Jersey milk lands, for example, you hear that the single hired man is hard to get—although a good house on the farm will attract a married hired man and his family. Thus, a lot fewer people, given extra arms and legs by machinery and electricity, are doing a lot more work on farms than ever before. The big chicken farmers in the shore area often base their decisions about whether to expand or to stand still on whether labor is available, then usually keep within the limit of the "family farm"—the farm operated by husband and wife and children old enough or big enough to work.

Harvest-time can bring tremendous problems in the state's potato fields, the orchards, the vegetable patches and other farms where a peak season arrives abruptly and then falls almost as abruptly. Harvest time brings thousands of Negro migrants from the South and more thousands of Puerto Ricans to dig potatoes, pick peaches and bring vegetables in from the fields. As one south Jersey agricultural agent says: "Without the migrant worker we would be out of business."

Migrant labor can—and does—pose problems. New Jersey has won some accolades for its improved housing and improved treatment of migrant workers but it would be naive to say that working conditions for the migrant are ideal on every farm. A recent Farm Bureau survey in south Jersey, for example, showed many broad areas in which considerable improvements can be made in employer-laborer relationships. Nevertheless, many farm leaders are working seri-

ously to achieve ever greater harmony; unpicked peaches bring no revenue to the farmer and no wages to the worker, nor do vegetables rotting in the fields.

KEEPING the next generation interested in farming is something else on the minds of many farm leaders. Often the tragic story is told of a son who stayed home and worked until he was in his 40s and no longer a boy. Meanwhile his brothers and sisters moved off to the city. When father died the farm was up for grabs—with no protection for the son who had given a lifetime to staying home and keeping the acres working.

Today many farmers are working out father-and-son agreements, whereby the sons who stay home and work the old family farm are fully protected—often to the extent of getting full control of the fields on which they have labored so hard. It seems like both poetic justice and good sense.

ALL the talk about electrification and mechanization and other labor-saving devices and gadgets might lead the observer to wonder if the farmer works at all. He does, and hard.

Many a New Jersey farmer works 12 to 15 hours a day during planting and harvesting seasons. Some farmers work for days on end at harvest time with only five hours' sleep at night. Farming is hard work—and the sun is just as hot, the July breezes just as blistering as they ever were, machines or no. There is a difference from the old days; in this era of crop specialization the farmer usually doesn't have predawn "chores" but he still must plant and harvest when nature says it's time.

He must also work in off-seasons, too. He must attend lectures, read farm magazines, study latest practices, consult with his county agricultural agent, maybe attend a short course at Rutgers. He must repair his machinery, contract his labor, order

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FARMING in the 20th CENTURY

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his supplies. If he chooses to ignore all the help he can get—in-season and off—he might save time, but he might not save the farm.

So the Garden State farmer in mid-20th century is a varied person. He is a solid and stable person. He works hard. He studies hard. He usually takes advantage of state and federal help. He supports his rural churches and he believes in bettering rural schools. He fights insects and disease and the problems of shifting market conditions. He also fights high taxes and the ever-threatening encroachment of industry and home development.

INDUSTRY and home development, true enough, offer a threat in green-back clothing—it's certainly not an economic threat. Usually whoever seeks to buy a farm for an industry or a development is willing to pay and pay high. Offers of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and up an acre in Essex, Bergen, Passaic and Union counties are not at all uncommon. They must be hard to resist.

Resist, the majority of farmers do, nevertheless. In Monmouth County, in the midst of a housing boom spurred by the completion of Garden State Parkway, many a farmer planted apple trees this spring. In Essex County, long beset by incoming development, they repaired their buildings and irrigation systems. Elsewhere they showed a desire to go on farming despite tantalizing offers for their land. Men who eye only the dollar sign don't plant apple trees or paint barns or build chicken houses or repair sprinklers if they plan to sell out soon.

Hence, count on this—agriculture will stay in New Jersey for many decades; it may get ever bigger, even if somewhat different. This is an age of intense specialization and no farmer in the world is better suited to cope with it than the New Jersey tiller of the soil.

SOME ask why the Garden State farmer stays put despite his long hours, his struggles with nature, his problems with labor, his worries over the market. Most farmers probably could earn more selling their acres and going to work in factories. Some have done so—and confided they wished they were back on the land.

Why? Well, it may be the independence. It may be the warmth of the April sun bringing life to the soil. It may be the thrill of a July rain arriving at just the right instant to save the drying fields. It may be the sound of a bob white calling in the lowlands at twilight. It may be the sight of the setting sun slanting off the red barns and the white silos. It may be the mystery of tiny shoots springing to life from dormant seed.

It may be all these things. It IS all these things and more: It is a way of life.



The Jersey farmwife as well as the farmer has benefited from electrical power line spread and pictured above in newly renovated farm kitchen is Mrs. Henry Rapp Jr. of Farmingdale. With an array of electrical appliances at her service, Mrs. Rapp finds time to do office work connected with the poultry business as well as keeping house. BELOW: The scenery alone would make the owner of this Garden State farm stay put.



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